



United States Department of Agriculture

Pleasant Project

Scoping Document



Forest Service
Allegheny National Forest

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Responsible Official:

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Additional information is available online at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59453>

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Introduction

The Forest Service, Allegheny National Forest (ANF), proposes forest management actions within the Pleasant project area. The Pleasant project is a planned, rotational forest management project on the Bradford Ranger District. It includes a response to recent forest health issues that presently exist or are anticipated to occur within the project area. The existing vegetation condition of the project area will be moved to the desired condition as described in the ANF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (USDA FS 2007a). Details of the project proposals are provided below and on the attached map. The proposal is posted through the Forest Service Schedule of Proposed Actions on the ANF website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59453>.

Proposed Project Location

The project area is located on the Bradford Ranger District in Brokenstraw, Conewango, Mead, Pleasant, and Watson Townships, Warren County, Pennsylvania. The majority of treatments are proposed within a 24,427 acre area that includes 13,020 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands and 11,406 acres of non-Forest Service lands. The project area boundary, however, is much larger (44,896 acres) to encompass additional invasive weed treatments proposed in the Allegheny Islands Wilderness and Hickory Creek Wilderness.

Need for the Proposal

Table 1 shows the known condition of forest structural stages and age classes for both private lands and NFS lands within the project area.

Table 1. Existing age class condition within the project area non-NFS and NFS lands^[1]

Forest Structural Stage	Age Class, Years	Non-NFS Land, Acres	NFS Lands, Acres	Total Acres	Percent Project Area
Early	0 to 10	178	160	338	1
	11 to 20	991	92	1,083	4
Young	21 to 50	793	964	1,757	7
Mature	51 to 80	855	1,027	1,882	8
	81 to 110	5,133	7,351	12,484	51
	111 to 150	2,348	2,833	5,181	21
	151 to 300	0	15	15	1
Non-Forested	-	1,108	578	1,686	7
Total		11,406	13,020	24,426	100

The purpose and need of the Pleasant project proposals are provided as follows:

- Provide a diversity of vegetation patterns across the landscape that represents well distributed habitats, a range of forest age classes and vegetative stages, a variety of healthy functioning vegetation layers, moderate to well-stocked forest cover, and the variety of vegetation species or

^[1] Non-FS land acreages and age classification from GIS analysis of historic aerial imagery from various sources dating from 1940 to 2018

forest types necessary to achieve multiple resource objectives and sustain ecosystem health (Forest Plan, page 14);

- Continue to implement and monitor a range of silvicultural and reforestation practices in order to be responsive to emerging issues and regenerate stands to a diversity of tree seedlings of good quality, form and health (Forest Plan, page 14);
- Restore, retain, and regenerate oak habitat and associated plant and animal communities that are currently declining due to unsuitable understory conditions for seedling growth, lack of natural disturbance by fire, and forest health threats such as non-native invasive plants and insects (Forest Plan, pages 14, 19, 20, 109, and A-14);
- Ensure a healthy, diverse, resilient, and well stocked forest is provided in light of several concurrent forest health threats (Forest Plan, pages 14, 15, and 21);
- Address non-native invasive plants (Forest Plan, page 13);
- Enhance wildlife habitat on 379 acres to provide desired cover and forage conditions (Forest Plan, page 20);
- Restore watersheds and their associated stream and groundwater processes, channel stability, riparian resources, and aquatic habitats to a functional condition (Forest Plan, page 14);
- Restore and enhance stream processes and aquatic habitat diversity for brook trout and other headwater stream fishes (Forest Plan, pages 14, 20, 22, 46, and 80);
- Provide a safe, efficient and economical transportation system that is responsive to public and administrative needs, while having minimal adverse effects on the natural forest ecosystem (Forest Plan, page 16).
- Non-native invasive plant species (NNIP) have become established within the project area and there is a need to implement treatment activities that will limit the further introduction and/or spread of these species and conserve forest resources in a manner that presents the least hazard to humans and maintains or restores forest resources (USDA- FS 2007a, pg. 13). An 'invasive species' means, with regard to a particular ecosystem, a non-native organism whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human, animal, or plant health. A 'Non-native species' or 'alien species' means, with respect to a particular ecosystem, an organism, including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material capable of propagating that species, that occurs outside of its natural range (Executive Order 13751, FSM 2900). Information/research on non-native invasive plant species is readily available on websites such as: the Forest Service Invasive Species Program website <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/invasive-species> and the PA Department of Conservation of Natural Resources <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/WildPlants/InvasivePlants/Pages/default.aspx>. Non-native invasive plant species occupy available growing space and use nutrients that could be used by more desired native species, often lack their natural biotic controls that coevolved with them at their place of origin to keep them in check. There is often a lag phase between first introduction and rapid expansion of the non-native invasive plants. Non-invasive plants, if left unchecked, will limit many uses on lands now and for future generations.

Proposed Action

Silvicultural Treatments

Table 2 shows the 5,742 acres of silvicultural treatments (24% of the project area) by MA proposed for the Pleasant Project. The attached map shows the compartments and stands, and site specific treatments being proposed for treatment. Descriptions of silvicultural treatments are provided in the Forest Plan, pages 64 to 69 and A-18 to A-26. Timber harvest is an outcome of implementing the stand improvements.

Table 2. Silvicultural actions proposed within the Pleasant project area.

Treatment	Management Area	Acres
Group selection to restore understory mature forest conditions. (RUMFC)	6.1	95
Two-aged harvest	6.1	11
Shelterwood/ removal cut with reserves.	6.1	150
Prescribed Fire	6.1	181
Group selection to restore understory mature forest conditions. (RUMFC)	3.0	86
Two-aged harvest	3.0	15
Shelterwood/ removal cut with reserves	3.0	1,990
Site preparation/final harvest	3.0	621
White-pine release	3.0	34
Prescribe Fire Silviculture	3.0	686
Prescribed Fire	3.0	1,873

Reforestation treatments (Table 3) are planned for all silvicultural proposals. The acres of reforestation are at the maximum and would likely be less based on the need as treatments are implemented. Descriptions of reforestation are provided in the Forest Plan, pages 70-72 and A-30-A-36.

Table 3. Reforestation actions and acres proposed within the Pleasant Project area.

Treatment	Acres
Site Preparation, herbicide, weed and release, fence, prescribed fire, scarification, and plant.	3,002
Fertilizer	495

Regeneration treatments combined with past and previously approved and not yet implemented may create temporary openings in areas (blocks) that could exceed 40 acres in size (Table 4).

Table 4. Temporary Openings > 40 acres within the Pleasant Project Area.

Block	MA	Stands	Acres
1	3.0	209029, 209058	42
2	3.0	218019, 218020, 218021	83
3	3.0	218032, 218033, 218034, 219037, 219038	163
4	3.0	219034 (WBT), 219047, 220023 (WBT)	78
5	3.0	205012, 205020 (MM), 205036	67
6	3.0	207012(MM), 207013(MM), 207020, 207021(MM), 207022, 207041(MM), 222005(MM)	155
7	3.0	208013(MM), 208021, 208024, 208034(MM)	96
8	3.0	220021	74
West Branch Tionesta (WBT), Mead's Mill (MM)			

Non-Native Invasive Plant Treatments

Nonnative invasive plant treatment would occur on approximately 8,550 acres throughout the project area using a combination of manual, mechanical, and herbicide treatments, or all three over the next 10 years. Implementation may occur in all management areas, including the Allegheny Islands Wilderness and Hickory Creek Wilderness.

Manual treatment could include pulling, digging, or hand-roughing. Mechanical treatment could include brush-cutting, mowing, or removal by motorized equipment. Herbicide treatment could include the use of glyphosate, sulfometuron methyl, or both, and would be applied in accordance with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines.

These combinations of treatments could occur several times during a growing season, or over a period of several years until the infestations have been effectively treated. Due to the nature of non-native invasive plants, additional infestations and species from the Allegheny National Forest Invasive Plant Species of Concern list could be treated if found within the project area, consistent with applicable Forest Plan direction. Also, if the ANF Forest Plan is amended in the future to include new chemicals for use on non-native invasive plants, they would be assessed for use within this project area in the future as well.

Wildlife

Tables 5 and 6 provide the wildlife habitat improvements being proposed in the Pleasant project area.

Table 5. Aspen wildlife habitat improvements.

Treatment	Comp/Stand and Silvicultural Treatment	Comp/Stand Acres (Not Treatment Acres)
Stands with Aspen present will be treated with Aspen Clearcutting with Reserves. This treatment will be used to promote Aspen regeneration for wildlife habitat improvement. This cutting of Aspen will help to create a patch work of different successional stages of Aspen, and to increase the amount of light on the forest floor to promote clonal root suckering, and help to expand select Aspen stands out to make them larger. These select sites will be treated between November and the end of March when trees are dormant. All applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be implemented.	204/32 – Non-Commercial Thinning	21.16
	207/27 – Aspen Clearcut with Reserves	26.64
	219/35 – Non-Commercial Thinning	31.43
	220/29 – Aspen Clearcut with Reserves	1.81
	221/32 – Aspen Clearcut with Reserves	24.45
	222/9 – Aspen Clearcut with Reserves	9.16
	224/47 – Non-Commercial Thinning	.61
	224/51 – Aspen Clearcut with Reserves	2.61
	224/52 – Aspen Clearcut with Reserves	1.51
		(Actual Treatment acres will vary depending on the abundance and age class of Aspen within each Comp/Stand)

Table 6. Other wildlife habitat improvements.

Compartment/Stand	Treatment	Acres of treatment
203/01,19; 222/09; 224/47,51.	Prune and release soft mast producing trees and shrubs within the Stand boundaries of the listed Stands. All resulting brush will be left on site to be utilized for the creation of brush piles for small mammal habitat. In addition, White Pine release also proposed in Stand 222/09. Implementation will vary by time of year. Treatments will not occur during nesting season (April 1 st to July 1 st). Pruning will occur between November and March. Tree release will generally occur between November and March. Conifers, trees containing cavities, trees containing stick nests, and butternut trees <u>will not</u> be cut.	Approximately 185.81
203/01	Create 3 to 4 Prescribed Burn Units within an approximately 110 acre open field area, eliminating existing smaller units. Burning will be accomplished predominantly mid-March to early April for warm season grass management, forage production, and the enhancement/restoration of brood rearing/nesting habitat. Conduct select Fall/Winter burning to enhance forb production for pollinator habitat and forage.	Approximately 110 acres
202/18; 204/24; 207/32; 209/56; 223/29,36 & 224/47	Plant soft mass producing trees & shrubs along with conifer groups within the boundaries of select stands, add individual fences and crib fences, till/lime/fertilize/seed all areas where possible with warm and/or cool season grass & forb mix, and install new nesting boxes where possible.	Approximately 194.06
203/01	Planting of warm season, cool season grass, and grass/forb seed mixes within an approximately 110 acre open field area are the only proposed plantings for this Comp/Stand. These grass mixes benefit a wide variety of wildlife, protect the archaeological integrity of the site, and will help to maintain a desired open field condition by helping to keep unwanted vegetation or forest succession from overtaking the area. All seeding/planting will be accomplished utilizing the NoTillDrill method.	

Aquatic Improvements

Table 7 summarizes the aquatic habitat and stream improvements treatments being proposed in the Pleasant project area. These treatments propose to fall up to 160 trees per mile into streams and onto floodplains. By doing so, stream processes such as ground water infiltration, discharge rates, and low flow rates as well as large wood functions such as creating pools, adding protective cover, trapping and sorting of spawning gravel can be restored or improved. Trees would be felled within the riparian area and would only occur where large woody debris is lacking and trees are available to be felled without significantly reducing stream shading or bank stability. Trees would be of sufficient size and positioned so they are stable in the stream and floodplain.

A rock ramp will be constructed to retrofit aquatic passage on Grunder Run at the culvert on Grunderville Road (SR 2012). This culvert is owned and maintained by Penn DOT. The structure is perched about 2 feet above the water surface creating a jump barrier and the paved inverts increase water velocity. These conditions make Grunder Run a complete barrier to aquatic organism passage. This project will restore aquatic passage connectivity with the Allegheny River. The construction will require a single access trail for equipment to deliver materials to the stream. An excavator will be used to construct the rock ramp. The disturbance will primarily be within the bankfull channel, but some disturbance will occur about 10 feet on either side of the channel to tie the structure into the bank. The disturbance and construction will start at the downstream end of the pool and will extend for a distance of less than 260 feet. The mapped disturbance area is large than the actual disturbance will be on the ground, but the exact paths have not been determined.

Table 7. Aquatic habitat and stream improvement treatments.

Treatment	Stream Miles
Level 1: Fell trees into streams and floodplains.	25.6
Level 2: A combination of felling trees into streams and winching the logs and tops with a grip hoist/other equipment to place in the stream.	4.2
Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) Retrofit: An excavator will be used to construct a rock ramp to restore aquatic passage on Grunder Run.	0.05

Transportation Improvements

Table 8 provides the transportation actions being proposed in the project area.¹

Table 8. Proposed Transportation Actions.

Road Activity	Total Mileage	Proposed²/Existing Road Numbers (Miles)	
Road Construction - New Corridor	1.3	FR 240A	0.3
		FR 643	1.0
Add Existing Non-System Corridor to National Forest Transportation System (which may involve road reconstruction, construction, and/or realignment) ¹	9.0	FR 155BA	0.2
		FR 155CA	0.3
		FR 155E	0.6
		FR 156A	0.3
		FR 156C	0.7

¹ In addition to these changes, failing culverts will be identified, prioritized and replaced.

² Proposed Forest Road numbers

		FR 169 Ext.	1.0
		FR 169B	0.2
		FR 245A	0.3
		FR 245B	0.2
		FR 253-1 Ext.	0.3
		FR 253-2 Ext.	0.7
		FR 253B	0.4
		FR 362C	0.6
		FR 362CA	0.3
		FR 362E	0.5
		FR 524 Ext.	0.2
		FR 524A	0.4
		FR 524C	0.4
		FR 539	0.1
		FR 856	1.0
		FR 871	0.3
Add Existing Non-System Corridor to National Forest Transportation System - <u>ROW Needed</u>	1.4	FR 156C	0.1
		FR 643	1.1
		FR 871	0.2
		FR 253B	0.3
		FR 651	1.0
		FR 651A	0.3
Temporary Road Development - on existing corridors	0.7	NS036830	0.6
		NS051725	0.1

Road Activity	Total Mileage	Existing Road Numbers (Miles)		Proposed Road Numbers (Miles)	
High Quality Road Surfacing - Existing NFS Roads with 300 feet of a stream	13.2	FR 119	1.5	FR 155E	0.1
		FR 155	1.8	FR 156A	0.3
		FR 155A	0.5	FR 156C	0.3
		FR 156	4.0	FR 240A	0.2
		FR 242	0.2	FR 524 Ext.	0.2
		FR 245C	0.1	FR 524A	0.1
		FR 292	0.2	Previously Approved FR 651	0.4
		FR 428-2	0.1		
		FR 438	0.8		
		FR 623	0.1	Rocky Gap ATV Trail	2.3

Forest Road Maintenance on Potential Haul Roads (exclude from NEPA)	30	Various Forest Roads			
Road Activity	Total	Location and Installation Type			
Gate Installation	5 gates	FR 253A		New Gate Installation	
		FR 362		New Gate Installation	
		Proposed FR 169B		New Gate Installation	
		Proposed FR 253-2 Ext.		New Gate Installation	
		Proposed FR 529		New Gate Installation	
Road Activity	Total Mileage	Existing Road Numbers (Miles)			
Proposed Road Management Changes	1.9	Road Number	Existing Status	Proposed Status	Miles
		FR 292	Open	Closed	0.6
		FR 292	Restricted	Closed	0.6
		FR 362	Open	Restricted	0.7

Trees that pose as a road hazard (diseased, dead, dying, or excessively leaning trees) would be felled and merchantable hazard trees would be harvested along roads of the project area. Equipment would remain on improved road surfaces. Hazard trees not accessible from roads would be cut and left on the site.

Design Features

Proposed actions are designed to minimize potential effects by meeting Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Additional mitigation measures may be developed during the project design and analysis to provide further protection to water resources; sensitive soils; threatened, endangered and sensitive species and their habitats; cultural resources, scenery, and recreation sites, as needed. If applicable, mitigation measures will be disclosed and discussed in the project's environmental documentation.

How Does this Relate to the Forest Plan?

This project has been designed to implement the Forest Plan, which is available online at www.fs.usda.gov/main/allegheny/landmanagement/planning.

The proposed actions are planned within Forest Plan management areas (MA) 3.0, MA 5.1, MA 6.1, MA 7.1, MA 8.1, and MA 8.4.

- MA 3.0 is managed for even-aged management and provides a mixed forest that is a mix of predominantly shade intolerant and mid-tolerant hardwood stands of various ages and associated understories, and habitat for a diversity of plant and animal species (Forest Plan, pages 113 to 116).

- MA 5.1 is designated wilderness area and is managed with an emphasis on the maintenance of wilderness values consistent with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and subsequent legislation to provide unconfined recreation opportunities in a Semi-primitive, non-roaded setting (Forest Plan, pages 26 -27).
- MA 6.1 is managed for conserving wildlife habitat, especially mature hardwood forests (e.g. for turkey, bear, and cavity-nesting birds and mammals) (Forest Plan, page 27).
- MA 7.1 is managed for large-scale, developed recreation areas in a rural setting. This management area is primarily used in the summer months and often provides a destination for visitors to use as a staging area for participating in other day use activities (Forest Plan, page 27).
- MA 8.1 is managed to protect Congressionally designated Wild and Scenic River (WSR) corridors. Vegetation management focuses on protecting and enhancing the outstandingly remarkable values that led to WSR designation (Forest Plan, pages 27 -29).
- MA 8.4 is managed for protection, maintenance, and interpretation of the Buckaloons Heritage Area as an administratively designated special interest area. Buckaloons contains a significant concentration of historic and prehistoric sites, which hold heritage, research, education, interpretation, and tourism values. Vegetation management is limited to activities consistent with this emphasis (Forest Plan, page 29).

What Happens Next?

An environmental assessment will be prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act, and your comments will help determine what the next steps are for this project. Depending on the input received, we may either:

1. Release the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact with the decision notice. A decision would be made without an additional comment period or opportunity to object.
2. Release the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact with a draft decision notice. We would not provide an additional comment period, but there would be an opportunity to object to our draft decision before a final decision is made.
3. Request additional comments on the environmental assessment before releasing a draft or final decision. An additional comment period would be provided, and there would be an opportunity to object to our draft decision before a final decision is made.

How to Comment

If you would like to provide input on our plans for this project, the comment period will begin when a legal notice is published in the Bradford Era, and end 30 days after publication. A copy of the legal notice will be posted on our project website. Comments submitted after the 30-day window closes will be considered if time allows, but would not result in eligibility to object to our draft decision.

- Comments may be sent by mail to Richard Hatfield, District Ranger, Bradford Ranger District, 29 Forest Service Drive, Bradford, Pa 16701.

- Comments may be emailed to comments-eastern-allegheny@usda.gov. Please enter the project name (**Pleasant Project**) on the subject line, and include your name and physical mailing address as well.
- Comments may be provided by calling 814-363-6000. Normal business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

All comments received will be considered. Comments that are site-specific, and include supporting documentation, will be especially helpful.

Please note that comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be available for public inspection as part of the project record.

For more information

For additional information, please contact Natural Resource Planner Wendy Andersen (814-363-6012; wendy.andersen@usda.gov).

Additional information is also available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59453>.